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# ALASKA People

BLM's acting Director Tom Fry will attend the start of the Iditarod Sled Dog race, March 4, in Anchorage. He will explain BLM's role in providing the race's permit and our management of the Iditarod National Historic Trail which crosses portions of the Iditarod race route.



January/February 2000

## Our Resident Poet Takes Top DOI Poetry Award

"Surprised" is how **Gene Ervine** describes winning first place in the Department of Interior's 150th anniversary poetry contest. Ervine, interpretive specialist at the BLM Alaska State Office since 1990, is best known for his interpretative work, but close friends know him as an accomplished and prolific poet.

Ervine's winning submission, *Campbell Creek, the Sun Moves It*, beat 49 other entries. Two years ago, he wrote the poem about the cycle of the Campbell Creek and its effects on plants and wildlife in Anchorage. The poem could easily have been inspired by Ervine's involvement with BLM's Campbell Creek Science Center, which is located near the stream.

"Writing poetry is my way of recording observations and emotions," he says. "*The Junkos Left Last Week*," his other entry written for retiring colleague, **Jim Sisk**, received honorable mention.

Ervine's poetry can run the gamut—"*Recreation*," was published in a magazine celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) and probably has the distinction of being the only poem using the words *multiple use*.

A self-described shy guy, Ervine admits to being the author of about 200 poems. For those who know



Ed Bovy

**As BLM-Alaska's lead interpretive specialist, Gene Ervine's job often takes him to the field.**

him well, he will punctuate a chance meeting in the halls of the Alaska State Office or a visit to his work cubicle with a spontaneous recitation of one of his latest works. He wrote his first poem when he was a teenager, 34 years ago.

"I don't see my fortunes changing because of this award," says Ervine. In an ideal world he would spend more time writing poetry, but he's content with capturing his poems in the margins of meeting agendas. "I'm into multi-tasking," he says.

Ervine is presently working on the development of the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in Coldfoot, Alaska. After vining peas and logging, he began his career with the Department of the Interior in 1976 as a laborer with the National Park Service and worked as a exhibits preservation specialist and exhibits planner before coming to BLM in 1990. He plans on doing a poetry reading at a future brown bag luncheon.

*See page 2 for award winning poem, Campbell Creek - The Sun Moves It*





## FIRE SERVICE Collects \$\$\$\$\$

by Andy Williams

The Alaska Fire Service has received \$400,000 as partial compensation for the cost of suppressing fires caused by a timber company in 1996. The settlement was negotiated with the insurance company of the now-defunct Copper River Forest Products Co. Total costs to the government of suppressing the fires were about \$1.1 million.

The fires occurred near Chitina and Tetlin in May and June of 1996, when the company was working under contracts to harvest timber on Alaska Native corporation land.

Investigations of the fires by the State of Alaska determined that the timber company was responsible for the fires. AFS Manager Scott Billing said the funds collected in the settlement will be used for fire prevention and education projects.

*Andy Williams is a writer-editor for the Alaska Fire Service*

## Campbell Creek—The Sun Moves It

by Gene Ervine

Up from the Northern Pacific  
To the clouds of the Chugach  
Range  
Sun moves the water

Chilled to crystalline  
symmetry  
Piled deep in valleys  
In shadows for later

Flake by flake the sun  
Frees those drifts to flow  
Moving downhill

Moose wade and drink here  
Ravens rattle the silence  
A sow and her cubs listen

Cottonwood, alder, and  
willows  
Devils club, Labrador tea,  
Canadian dogwood  
Different scents drawing water

Sun on the leaves  
Moves it up stem  
Cell by cell

Salmon eggs swell and twitch  
Membranes tear  
And the new fish breathe

The stream that  
The Sun moves  
From ocean to mountain

Then downstream  
Nourishment taken  
The fish flow to sea

Lynx, martin, or vole  
Make their lives  
And pause to drink

Wolf tracks fresh  
At the water's edge  
Disappear in the current

Later, sunlit  
At the edge of water  
We look and learn

Learn to see the light  
And see the shadow  
Finding the edges

Across the ocean  
A salmon turns  
To scent this stream

After the hard swim,  
Belly on the rocks home  
Who knows where it will end?

Spawn to begin again  
Or the flash of a grizzly paw  
Or eagle talon piercing the scales.

Up from the Northern Pacific  
To the clouds of the Chugach  
Range  
Sun moves the water

And we stand at the edge  
Surrounded by what grows here  
While the Sun moves it all

Look for the next issue of *Alaska People* which will give employees a pictorial breakdown of BLM-Alaska's millennium workforce.

In February, External Affairs introduced the *BLM-Alaska NewsBeat*, a new monthly newsletter highlighting issues and work done by employees. *NewsBeat* does not replace *Alaska People*, but rather concentrates on the work done by employees while *Alaska People's* focus is on employees and their interests.



# Has our COLA



# gone on a diet?

by Ed Bovy

**Question: When is a  
GS-9 not a GS-9?**

**Answer: When you  
work in Alaska!**

Is this a joke or a trick question? Neither. If you are another grade or work for another federal agency in Alaska, the same answer applies to you, too. As you'll see, "It all depends on what you mean by 25 percent."

As a federal employee in Alaska, you probably think that the 25 percent Alaska COLA you are being paid is an additional 25 percent cost-of-living allowance for working in Alaska. Wrong!

Go to the Office of Personnel Management website [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov), and look up your base pay under the federal General Schedule and write it down. But notice that a whole list of cities that qualify for "locality pay," so be sure to use the right table.

Locality pay started off small and with good intentions. It originally applied to places like San Francisco and New York City, where the cost of living is greater than most places and the federal government had trouble attracting quality workers. Like many government programs, it grew. Now there are 31 locations on the list, some covering multi-county or multi-state areas. Places like Orlando, (FL)

and Huntsville (AL) are now on the list too.

If you scroll down to the bottom of this long list, you'll find a 32nd category for everywhere else in the contiguous 48 states not specifically listed. Unbelievably, everyone else in the Lower 48 now qualifies for locality pay! They don't use the "old" (and cheaper) GS tables any more — but Alaska does. All this is caused by the dual standard of locality pay vs. COLA, compounded over time. For example, in January, federal employees in Alaska got a 3.8 percent pay raise, but locality pay gave all Lower 48 feds at least a 4.69 percent increase — more in some cities. Similar "spreads" now happen every year and will continue unless the law is changed.

**"If the Alaska COLA was cut completely, all of us would be making less in Alaska than federal employees in the lower 48."**

Now for the bad news. Compare your base pay for your grade/step, used to compare your COLA on the original GS table to what you would be making if you did the same work in the Lower 48 under the "new" GS locality tables.

For example, for FY 2000 the

GS-9-1 base pay in Alaska is \$32,380, but if you are working anywhere in the Lower 48, you would make at least \$34,575. Want more? Just move to Boston where a GS-9 makes at least \$35,851. Still not enough? You'll get a whopping \$37,169 in, of all places, Houston — that's \$5,000 more than Alaska! (Texas has no state income tax and you don't have to heat your house. Go figure.) Tops on the list is New York City. And remember, these differences magnify with changes in steps and grade! A GS-12-1 will have a base pay of \$46,955 in Alaska, but earns at least \$50,139 in the Lower 48. Want even more? Just hop down to Seattle and get an instant 9 percent raise — to \$51,275 — in base pay. Why should you care about this? Using simple math, it means the value of your Alaska COLA is not the 25 percent you thought you were getting, and the differences between Alaska and the Lower 48 are narrowing each year as locality pay is awarded down south but not up here. It narrows again as your step or grade goes up. In other words, the relative value of your COLA is shrinking every year! Right now, your COLA is "worth" only 21 percent or less.

Is there any chance of this changing? Probably not. Most members of Congress would love to cut our COLA. In fact, Outside Congressmen and OPM have tried to get rid of COLA several times and failed, so they developed a



*Cola story, continued from pg 3*

new strategy: give everyone else more! They've won.

Right now, if the Alaska COLA was cut completely, all of us would be making less in Alaska than in the Lower 48! It's right in the tables.

Younger workers can calculate exactly when they will make less in Alaska than the Lower 48, even with COLA. It's just math, pure and simple. It gets worse for older workers. If you planned to finish your career in Alaska and then retire, you may want to sharpen your pencil — you will be penalized (big time) for living here. When your retirement pay is calculated, OPM will take the average of your highest three years of—that's right—base pay! And that does NOT include COLA.

Go to the Civil Service annuity tables and see for yourself what this means. For example, someone having a "high three" of \$50,000 in Alaska could get \$28,125 per year in retirement after 30 years service. If that same person had retired in the Lower 48 with a base high three salary \$5,000 higher, the retirement benefit would increase to \$30,938, a difference of \$2,813 per year, forever. That comes to \$56,260 spread over 20 years of retirement—even more if you include compounding from investments and living longer. That's a lot of money just for getting your high three in the Lower 48. How many of you have been working in Alaska thinking it was best for you, suffering cold, long winters year after year for the COLA? How many of you have been swaggering around with a big smile on your face, telling your Lower 48 friends about that juicy 25 percent COLA? Think again.

The bottom line? Your pay stub still says you are getting 25 percent COLA but the value of that COLA is diminishing. Are you

better off staying here, anyway? Maybe, since COLA is free from federal income tax. But for some it could be to your advantage to transfer to the Lower 48 even if you do not get a promotion. Or take a job for three years Outside and then try to transfer back. Certainly you will not be losing as much money as you thought you

were. But if you anticipate staying in Alaska, consider investing some or all of that COLA each month in some high quality no-load funds to make up for the subtle but real difference in base pay. It will help you financially in a big way for the rest of your life.

*Ed Bovy is a public affairs specialist on the External Affairs staff.*

## Thrift Savings Board Announces More Delays

by Scott Guyer

On January 11, 2000, the Executive Director of the Thrift Savings Plan Board announced another delay in implementing the TSP record keeping system. American Management System, Inc. (AMS), was awarded the contract to make the changes in May of 1997; three years later, the job still isn't done.

The new system, which was to take effect in May and is now postponed until October, would introduce two new funds and change the TSP from a monthly-valued plan to a daily-valued plan. The new S-fund is a small capitalization fund, while the I-fund will invest in an international stock index.

Under the new plan, changes to your TSP can be made on a daily basis, which is what almost all of the 9,000 U.S. mutual funds have provided to their shareholders for years. Currently, TSP transactions take a minimum of two weeks to more than a month to process. If a TSP investor

chooses to switch to another fund, the lag time can cost thousands of dollars.

Another problem: federal workers still lag behind private holders of 401(k) plans in their ability to invest more than 10 percent of their income, up to \$10,500 a year. Rep. Constance A. Morella (R-MD) recently introduced legislation that would allow federal workers to invest up to the same maximum amount.

Each additional delay in implementing the new system is a continued disservice to thousands of federal employees, especially those who rely on the TSP as their main source of retirement savings. Overall, the TSP program has enhanced retirement of federal employees; however, there is a long way to go to modernize a system that should have been in place years ago. *Scott Guyer is a general biologist with the Division of Cadastral Survey.*



# OVERWEIGHT Americans are Dying by the Thousands

Being overweight is killing 300,000 Americans each year. Between Thanksgiving and New Years Day Americans on average gain five to 10 pounds, and consume two pounds of fat. Research says 55 percent of all adults are overweight. If the trend continues, experts say that within a few generations virtually every U.S. adult will be overweight, plus one-third of all children. Obesity is the reason why so many Americans have elevated cholesterol and blood pressure levels. It's linked to stroke, diabetes, premature death and asthma.

The trend of being overweight and obese is moving upwards according to the *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey*. Although studies show we are eating less, we are heavier than ever. It doesn't make sense.

Ten years ago the local supermarket had very few low calorie



foods, and they didn't taste very good because the missing fats removed the flavor from the food. In today's supermarkets it's a dieters' paradise. There are non-fat yogurts, fat-free cookies, pastas, muffins, etc., and many of these foods taste just as delicious as their heavyweight originals.

So why are we getting heavier when we are eating lighter? Most of the new foods are created by engineers, not chefs. They have created many new fat substitutes which are made from sugar and ultra-refined carbohydrates says Rick Handel, a leading nutritional scientific researcher. These high tech foods may not have any fat but, in fact, deliver twice the sugar

calories of homemade versions. Too many empty carbohydrate calories in the diet can be as bad or worse than too much fat.

A study published by the *New England Journal of Medicine* says eating too much sugar, bread or pasta steps up production of metabolic enzymes that cause us to store even more fat. Carbohydrates, proteins and even fat have their place. In moderation, fat in the diet slows down the absorption of calories and stimulates the hormone CCK, which signals the brain when you're full.

What about low calorie dieting? At first you will lose some weight, although the pounds lost are mostly water and lean muscle. But your body senses that it is starving, and your metabolism slows down and protects itself by converting everything you eat into reserved fat for fuel. When your body goes into this mode, you quickly go back to your original weight, but now a greater percentage is fat and a lesser percentage is lean muscle tissue. Since only lean muscle tissue can burn calories, future dieting becomes more difficult. This leads to the yo-yo syndrome where every cycle of weight loss is followed by even more weight gain.

Relying on calorie restriction or drugs to reduce your weight isn't recommended by the National Institute of Health because of health risks. Instead, a multidimensional approach that includes a healthy but simple eating plan, exercise, behavioral strategies and goal setting is recommended by Dr. Earl Mindell, Ph.D. R.Ph., a leading nutritionist. A successful program should include a thermogenics aspect that does not stress the adrenal system. Thermogenics is the metabolic process in which we maintain our body temperature by burning our stored body fat as fuel.

Source— Institute for Nutritional Health newsrelease

## Are You a Typical Federal Employee?

According to the Office of Personnel Management, as of March 31, 1999, the average federal employee was 45.7 years old with 16.7 years of service. Nearly 40% of the work force has a bachelor's degree or higher. Men comprise 55% of the work force. Minorities comprise 30.2% of the federal work force. Worldwide, the average pay is \$46,000 while the average annual pay in the D.C. area is \$60,000. The average GS grade is 9.4.



# Cool News

## Mapping and Surveying Conference Honors NFO with Awards.

In February, GIS coordinator **Tim Hammond** and wildlife biologist **Jim Herriges** from the NFO placed second in the digitally-created cartographic products category at the Alaska Surveying and Mapping Conference held in Anchorage.

## Retiree Gets Due Recognition.

**Jim Sisk**, recently retired natural resource specialist with the Northern Field Office, received a Department of Interior Superior Service award at the South Dakota Field Office in Belle Fourche, S.D., on January 13. Through his efforts, BLM-Alaska received more than \$8 million under the Intermodal Surface Efficiency Act (ISTEA) for recreational facilities and improvements on Alaska lands.

## Flick of the Wrist Saves Employee from Injury.

A quick thinking **Scott Guyer** deflected a puck with the flick of his hand when the projectile came speeding towards his head during a recent Aces hockey game. He says the bump on his hand was nothing compared to the woman sitting behind him who had four teeth knocked out by the ricocheting putt.

**Reluctant Good-byes.** The very likeable and dearly missed **Vivian Powell**, secretary for Human Resource Management, left the Alaska State Office, her home for many years, for a job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Powell says she will return for a higher-paying job.

**St. Paddy's Day Special.** **Bill Schorr**, a materials handler with the Branch of Field and Office Services, will marry Betty Willey on St. Patrick's Day in March. She works on the Joint Pipeline Office staff for the State of Alaska.



**Mike Brown (l) receives award from fellow colleague Jim Ducker, the editor of Alaska History**

## Alaska History Awards BLM

**Historian.** An account of how a remote longtime trapper, trader, miner, and hunting guide used contacts with wealthy game hunting clients to create the Tetlin Indian Reserve in 1930, won the first \$500 prize for the best article in *Alaska History*. The award went to **C. Michael Brown**, historian at the BLM's Alaska State Office and Society member for more than two decades. Brown initially studied the creation of the Tetlin Reserve in connection with litigation involving the boundary of the reserve in the 1980s. His subsequent research on the reserve and the man at the center of its establishment, John K. Hajdukovich, resulted in the prize-winning article.

**Singing LaLaLaLaLa!** Did you know we have a singer in the house? Conveyances **Roz Holland** has been a member of the Anchorage Sourdough Chorus, a chapter of the Sweet Adelines International since January 1991. She sings four-part accapella barbershop harmony. Holland and the chorus recently performed at the Fur Rondy Melodrama, and sang last summer at the Talkeetna Moose Dropping Festival, Alaska State Fair, baseball games, and folk festivals. Each spring they travel outside Alaska to compete in regional competitions. Going this year to Spokane, Washington, they will compete against 15 other choruses. They were 1998 and 1999 Regional Small Chorus Champions. However, highlights for Holland and chorus included singing at Carnegie Hall, Good Morning America and on the Today Show.

## Joint Pipeline Office Employee Honored for Navy Time.

**Rob McWhorter**, an employee concerns specialist with the JPO was honored by the Alaskan Command and the Alaska National Guard leaders for his service as the State's Defense Coordinating Officer, the first reservist ever to be named a DCO. McWhorter retired from the National Guard on Y2K day, with 30 years of naval service."

**Walker Becomes Cowen.** Land law examiner **Marsha Walker**, with the Division of Conveyance Management, married Thomas Cowen, Jr. on February 18 at the Jewel Lake Parish in Anchorage.





## Rohn Cabin Ready for the Iditarod Race

The 61-year old historic Rohn Cabin, located on the Iditarod Trail, received major renovations during the summer of 1999 and is ready for winter trail users. **Jake Schlapfer** and **Bruce Seppi** from the Anchorage Field Office worked with **Steve Sandy** and **Ken**

**Higgins**, Alaska State Office employees, to replace a badly rotted roof, and sill and wall logs. "Roof shingles were made from gas cans that had been left at Rohn back in the 1930s," says Schlapfer. "They were opened up, pounded flat, and used as shingles when the cabin was built in 1938. We found reproductions of these cans and made shingles to replace the ones that had rusted beyond use."

Rohn is one of four cabins on the Iditarod Trail managed by the BLM. Rohn Cabin provides shelter during February and March for Iditarod Sled Dog Race and Irondog Snowmobile Race participants.

## In Memoriam

Retired BLM surveyor **Hobart Hyatt** died December 25, 1999 at the Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage. He was 79. Hyatt joined the old U.S. General Land Office as a cadastral surveyor and transferred to Alaska in 1950 with the BLM. He surveyed homesteads, townsites and Native allotment claims until his retirement in 1975. He was an active member of BLM Alaska's retirees group, and will be remembered as a unfailingly polite and gentle soul.

## Glennallen Field Office Gets Second Acting Field Manager

**Rodd Moretz** began a 60-day detail as the acting Glennallen Field Manager February 28. Moretz is a civil engineer at the Northern Field Office. He replaces **Cathy Jensen**, GFO realty specialist, who was acting Glennallen Field Manager for 120 days.

## Fitness Facility Update



Eighty-four ASO employees responded to the recent federal fitness facility survey. Ninety

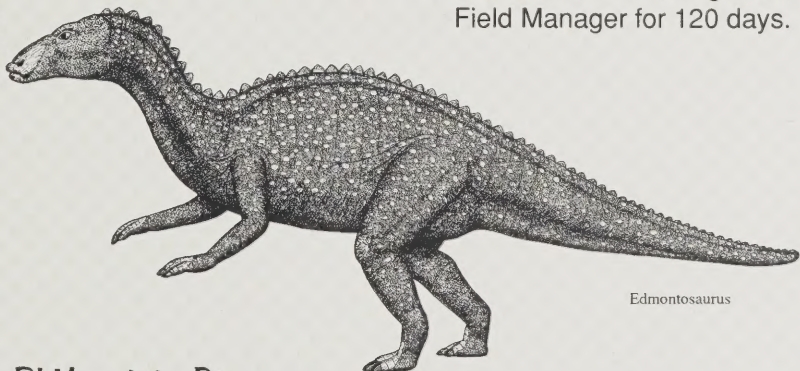
percent of the respondents would use the facility, about 50 percent were willing to pay monthly dues between \$10-15 ; and 63 percent of the respondents preferred an even mix of aerobic and strength machines. The facility will only be available to federal building employees.

Issues and concerns identified by BLM employees were—

- cleanliness of facility
- abuses of time
- cost of operating the facility is offset by improved employee health and morale
- need for trainer/instructor
- additional requests for equipment, etc. include: sauna/steam room, rowing machine, indoor track, aerobic room, punching and speed bag, upright bicycles.

The facility is still scheduled to open in June. Currently, the fitness facility committee is addressing liability issues.

©Carl Ramm



Edmontosaurus

## BLM and the Dinosaurs

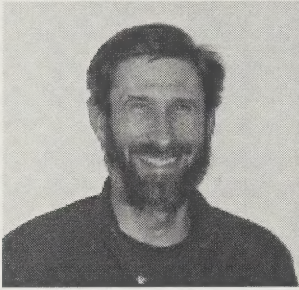
In the 1980s, the first dinosaur bones discovered on the Alaska North Slope belonged to the duckbilled *Edmontosaurus*. Fully grown, these plant-eaters could grow to 10 feet tall, and 40 feet long, and weigh three tons. These dinosaurs are thought to have lived in social groups or herds. How did they survive so far north? Did they slow their metabolism or hibernate? Did they migrate southward for food and warmer climates?

New discoveries on the Colville River throw doubt on the migration theory. Several new dinosaurs, including small meat eaters such as the Toodon and Dromaeosaurus probably couldn't physically migrate the round-trip of 5,000 miles. Instead, North Slope dinosaurs may have survived year-round on ancient river systems which supported lush summer vegetation.

Want to know more? Check out BLM's dinosaur display at the upcoming Sportsman Show at the Sullivan Arena, April 13-16 in Anchorage.



# What recent success have you had on the job?



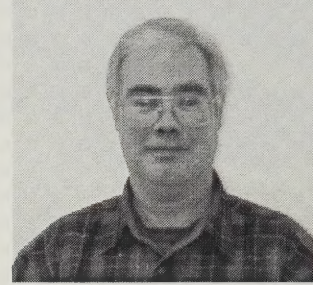
**Joe Kurtak, Geologist**  
**Lands & Minerals Group**  
**Div. of Lands, Minerals & Res**

Seeing a project through to completion, from the organizational states to the final reports. And the most important part was having fun along the way.



**Hillerie Patton**  
**Writer-Editor, Office of Public**  
**Affairs, Washington Office**

I went to Grambling State University as a recruiter for BLM's Student Career Employment Program (SCEP). I had graduated there from the Department of Mass Communications.



**Jim Moore**  
**Realty Specialist**  
**Anchorage Field Office**

In 1999, Renee Fencil and I reviewed and corrected the federal land record in the 781 townships which make up the Matanuska Sustina Borough.

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**Alaska People**  
Bureau of Land Management  
222 West 7th Avenue, #13  
Anchorage, Alaska 99513-7599  
tele. 907.271.3335

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Danielle Allen  
Janet Malone

Editor/Writer/Design/Layout  
Assistant Editor

**BLM Library**  
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**P.O. Box 25047**  
**Denver, CO 80225**